

Chapter 1

History of the Army National Guard

The history of the militia can be divided into two major periods. From the colonial era to ca. 1900, America's military system was dominated by the militia, that is, a state-controlled, decentralized army of citizen soldiers commanded by the various colonial (later state) governments. After ca. 1900, the militia was replaced by the regular army, that is, a centralized corps of professional soldiers under federal control. Dating back to the arrival of the first settlers in the New World, the actions and rhetoric of various groups and individuals expressed America's preference for a decentralized militia rather than a centralized army. For example, on the eve of the War of Independence, the Provincial Convention of Maryland proclaimed that "a well-regulated militia, composed of gentlemen freeholders and other freemen, is the natural strength and only stable security of a free government."¹ Nearly a century later, the adjutant general of New York State echoed that sentiment when he remarked in his annual report for 1867 that "a large permanent army [is] correctly considered [to be] the most formidable menace to the liberties of the people."² Three and one-half decades after that, the author of an article in a 1901 issue of the *Forum* remarked that "we are a peaceably disposed people, and only take up the sword when no other alternative is left us. . . . A military system should be an evolution of the war spirit of the people. The American people in the rare periods in which their war spirit has been aroused have shown clearly that they prefer a volunteer soldiery."³

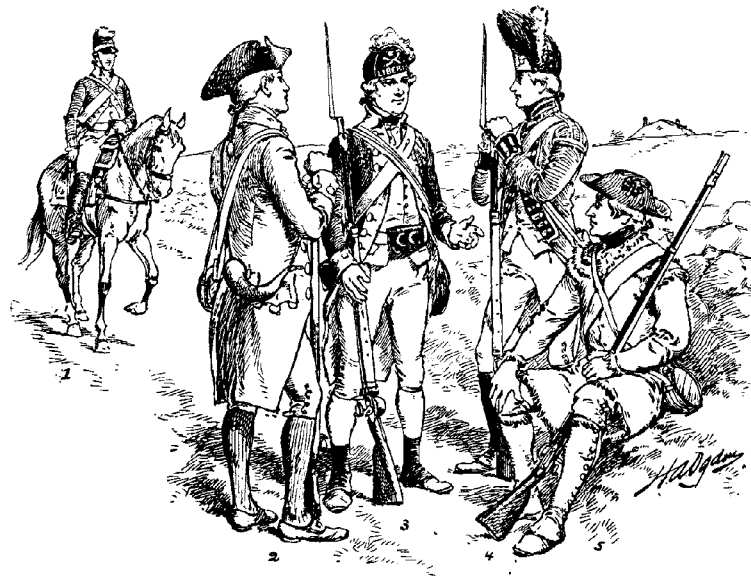
The era of the citizen soldier can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, encompassing the colonial and early republican eras, represents the establishment and dominance of a compulsory militia in the New World. The second, beginning during the second quarter of the nineteenth century and ending with the Civil War, signals the demise of mandated militia service and the rise of the volunteer militia.⁴ The last phase, spanning nearly four decades between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century,

marks the heyday of the National Guard as the primary force of the American military system. It was during this era of labor-capital conflict that New York's militia achieved its greatest acclaim as a domestic peacekeeper.

Colonial Era to the War of 1812

Upon their arrival in the New World, the first European settlers, most of whom were English, immediately adopted a militia system (based on British precedent) in which all able-bodied men were required by law to bear arms in times of need. Virginia codified the first laws for a militia in 1611; Massachusetts followed suit in 1636. Most other colonies also adopted policies that established short-term, compulsory military service.

In the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam (later New York City), the first militia law was passed at the 9 May 1640 meeting of the New Amsterdam Council.⁵ However, it was not until 1653 that the Dutch militia, dubbed the Burgher Guard, was mustered into service to ward off English encroachment into New Netherland (later New York State) territory. Militia units in rural areas of New Netherland appear to have been established as early as 1654, but New Amsterdam's Burgher Guard appears to have been the most organized and best trained. A primary mandate of many of these units was fire-fighting duty. In 1663 the three companies of the Burgher Guard were summoned to the village of Esopus (later Kingston) to defend the settlement against the Esopus Indians. When the British finally took over New Amsterdam in 1664, the Burgher Guard, consisting of only 180 militiamen, simply surrendered. In 1686 the former Burgher companies were reorganized as a Regiment of Foot, under Colonel Nicholas Bayard.⁶



*This drawing, which accompanied an article by Daniel Morgan Taylor in the March 1890 issue of the *Cosmopolitan*, provides a late nineteenth-century journalist's interpretation of what members of the militia might have looked like during the colonial era. The caption for the drawing on page 569 of the magazine identifies the militiamen as follows, from left to right: a member of the Philadelphia City Troops; a New England Minuteman; a New York Rifleman; a member of the Connecticut Foot-guards; and a Virginia Rifleman.*

Each colony was responsible for funding and operating its own militia. In virtually every case, related costs devolved upon the individual militiamen themselves. As a result, militias in different colonies varied widely in terms of levels of training, leadership and equipment. Nonetheless, the colonial militia generally managed to fulfill both the defensive and offensive needs of the settlers; in fact, such troops even proved worthy of assisting the British in defending the Empire's interests in North America during the French and Indian War (1754–1763).

The militia also served during the Revolutionary War as an auxiliary force of the Continental Army, that is, the provisional force of soldiers furnished by the individual colonies and directly accountable to the Continental Congress. Many historians agree that the war was won in spite of, rather than because of, the involvement of the militia; records abound documenting the inadequacies of citizen



This 1987 rendering of a Virginia Militiaman during the Revolutionary War, painted by the renowned military artist Don Troiani, illustrates a rather ill-equipped farmer called into service to augment the Continentals during the rebellion against Britain. In agreement with many military historians, Troiani states that the militia's performance was "less than stellar" during several specific battles, but, in concert with the regulars, the militia ultimately redeemed its reputation. Thus, the way was paved for the solidification of the role of the citizen soldier during the early republican era. Painting by Don Troiani, www.historicalartprints.com.

soldiers. Nonetheless, during the conflict as well as after the victory, the militia was sanctioned on numerous occasions. On 18 July 1775, three months after the “shot heard ‘round the world” was fired in Concord, Massachusetts, the Continental Congress passed the first militia act. On 22 August 1775 New York passed its own Provincial Militia Act. Both the U.S. Constitution, signed in 1789, and the U.S. Militia Act of 1792, which fleshed out the Militia Act of 18 July 1775, reaffirmed the fledgling nation’s commitment to the concept of citizen soldiery, despite violent protests expressed by postwar Federalists who argued for replacing the militia with a centralized, regular army composed of full-time, professional soldiers. In 1786 New York’s militia was formally organized into two divisions. The First Division encompassed all units in Manhattan (then known as New York City)⁷ and the Second Division comprised all other units in the state.

The first real test of the new republic’s military organization occurred in the middle of the first decade of the nineteenth century, when America’s commercial interests and seafaring rights were suffering the effects of the ongoing feud between the British and French empires. In an effort to protect itself, the United States enacted the Embargo Act of 1807, and on 12 February 1808, New York State passed the Act for the Defense of the Northern and Western Frontiers. Tensions continued to increase until finally, in June 1812, the United States declared war on Britain and a three-year conflict ensued.

Technically, America won the War of 1812, but the victory had little to do with the young republic’s military prowess. First of all, despite the rhetoric about the superiority of the militia system, America’s volunteer soldiers were, in reality, woefully ill-equipped and poorly led, primarily because, until 1806, Congress had never provided a single penny for the proper outfitting and training of militiamen. Secondly, Britain only half-heartedly applied herself to the War of 1812; her primary resources were directed toward the conflict with France on the European continent. Moreover, upon finally defeating Napoleon in 1814, Britain turned her attention away from North America and toward colonizing the Near East. While not acknowledging defeat, Britain offered peace to the United States on 11 February 1815; a treaty was ratified eight days later.



Despite the fact that the federal government had mandated the militia to be the primary force and the Regular Army to be the secondary force in the newly formed United States, few states were willing or able to adequately train or equip their citizen soldiers. Thus, on the eve of the War of 1812, the militia was ill-prepared for battle, as portrayed in this late twentieth-century painting of a farmer called to serve his country in defense against British forces. Nonetheless, the militia managed to redeem its reputation and was ratified as the primary force of the American military system during the antebellum era. Image, entitled “52nd Regiment, NY Militia, 1810–1816” (Plate 537), courtesy of David M. Sullivan, Company of Military Historians.

Some used America's "victory" in the War of 1812 as evidence of the credibility of the militia system. Proponents of a regular army, on the other hand, were quick to cite the incompetence of the non-professional soldiers. A number of follies committed by citizen soldiers made it easy to ridicule them. For example, there is the tale of several Rockland County companies stationed in New York City during the autumn of 1814. Repeatedly denied permission to return home to harvest their crops, the militiamen abandoned their posts and marched off one night for home en masse. However, it must be noted that once they harvested their crops, they marched back to camp and resumed their military responsibilities.⁸

Despite the frequent and often accurate criticism of the militia, the anti-Federalists prevailed and a decentralized, state-controlled system of citizen soldiery persisted, at least in theory, after the War of 1812. However, neither the federal nor the state government made available sufficient funds to carry out the mandates outlined in the militia acts. Coupled with the war-weariness that pervaded the nation in the late 1810s, the militia, at least in its compulsory form, died out during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Antebellum Era

The volunteer militia emerged during the 1820s to replace the defunct compulsory militia. Several factors contributed to the popularity of the "new" militia. First, relatively stable economic, social and political conditions resulted in a class of wealthy young men of leisure who had both the time and the money to invest in social or fraternal activities. Second, as memories of the horrors of war faded with each passing year, subsequent generations succumbed to romanticized memories of the glorious battles of the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Consequently, hundreds of young men fascinated by the pomp and circumstance of the military joined the volunteer militia.

In New York State, notable units that were either established or greatly expanded during this antebellum period include the Second Battalion (later the National Guards), the Pulaski Cadets (later the New York City Guard) and the Washington Greys in Manhattan; the Light Guard and the Chasseurs in Brooklyn; the Washington



This tinted stipple engraving by Louis François Charon, dating from ca. 1815, shows a romanticized version of an early nineteenth-century militia officer from an unidentified New York unit. Courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection.

Continental in Albany; the Twenty-eighth Artillery in Buffalo; the Willard Guards in Auburn; the DeWitt Guards in Ithaca; the Oswego Guards in Oswego; and the Penfield Pioneers near Rochester.⁹

During these years three roles for the volunteer militia crystallized: first and foremost, it was a military body charged with ensuring both domestic and international peace; second, it was a civic entity whose responsibilities included appearing at both somber and festive



Members of the Pulaski Cadets (later renamed the New York City Guard) were pictured on the front cover of the 10 May 1856 issue of Leslie's. The caption describes the costumes, from left to right, as follows: Lieutenant's full uniform; Captain, full dress overcoat; Captain, full dress; First Lieutenant, regimental uniform; full dress, Private; regimental uniform, Private, undress.

public events; finally, it was an elite fraternal organization for members of New York's middle and upper classes. These roles would become clearly defined during the late nineteenth century, and all three would exert a profound impact on the evolution of the armory as a specific building type.

As a military organization, the volunteer militia gained widespread prestige during the antebellum era for its success in quelling domestic disturbances in both urban and rural settings. The earliest signs of unrest appeared in New York City, one of the first cities in the country to experience the social and economic turmoil that accompanied America's transition from a rural agrarian and light manufacturing nation into a fledgling urban, industrial giant. Accompanying this transition were harbingers of the ill-effects of rampant industrialization, urbanization and immigration (for example, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, long hours spent toiling in unsafe work environments and gross inequities in pay scales) that later sparked a series of strikes and riots that nearly paralyzed the nation.

Although domestic uprisings during the antebellum period were sporadic and generally unorganized, local police forces were quickly proven unequal to the task of controlling the violence; in desperation, authorities called upon the militia to assist. Disturbances in the New York City area in which the militia served included the Flour Riots of 1826, the Election Riot of 1834, the Abolition Riot of July 1834, the Stonecutters' Riot of 1835, the Stevedore Riots of 1836, the Croton Water Riots of 1840, the Astor Place Riot of 1849, the Dead Rabbits Riots of 1857 and the Staten Island Quarantine Riots of 1858.¹⁰ These pre-Civil War conflicts were quite varied in their causes and the natures of their protagonists. For example, the Stonecutters' Riot erupted in opposition to the use of convict labor in the building industry. The Astor Place Riot, one of New York City's bloodiest disputes during the antebellum era, began as a shouting match between rival groups of theater patrons but soon snowballed into a full-scale street brawl. William Swinton, in his 1869 history of New York's Seventh Regiment, recalls the role of the unit during the mayhem on Astor Place:

Fully twenty thousand men and boys, the dregs of the city, gathered around the theater, armed with stones, sticks and pistols. . . . Three hundred police were driven back, after a gallant struggle to disperse them; and at length . . . the Seventh Regiment . . . was ordered up. At 9 p.m. the regiment arrived at Astor Place, preceded by the National Guard Troop and a company of cavalry. The mounted men, ten abreast, charged through the place from Broadway; but their horses, galled by the fire of the mob, became unmanageable, and they reached Third Avenue, having accomplished nothing. The Seventh Regiment then followed . . . clearing a way to Third Avenue; thence in columns of companies, clearing Eighth Street, and finally, again moving through Broadway into Astor Place, and forming a line in front of the theater. The volleys of stones from the mob there became very severe;



The Astor Place Riot in New York City in 1849 was one of dozens of localized strikes, riots or disturbances during the antebellum era that were quelled by the militia. This rendering of the Astor Place Riot appears in Colonel Emmons Clark's History of the Seventh Regiment (1890), the two-volume history of the unit that is still widely considered to be the definitive chronicle of the regiment.

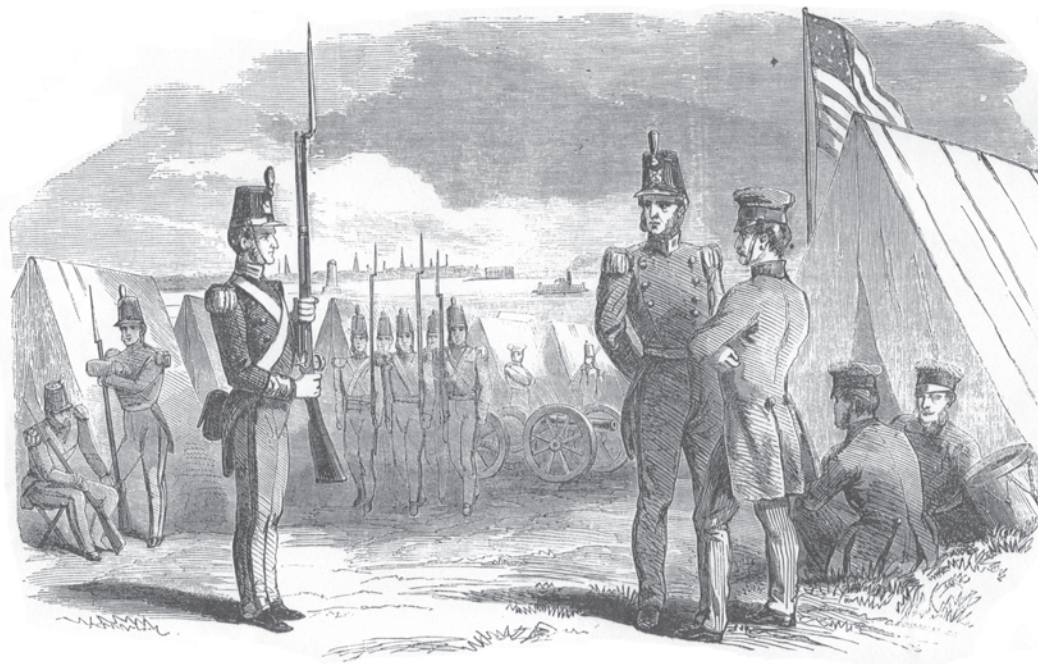
but the regiment preserved its magnificent discipline under the trying ordeal. . . . The first volley was purposely aimed high; the second was point-blank, and was delivered with terrible effect; and pressing hard on the flying mob, the troops soon cleared Astor Place of rioters.¹¹

According to Swinton, “from that eventful night dates, perhaps, the civic popularity and national prestige of the Seventh Regiment. Its courage, promptness, discipline and steadiness were long the theme of conversation, and no honors of the city or citizens were thought too high to be paid to these trustworthy guardians of law and order.”¹²

Eight years later, the Dead Rabbits and the Bowery Boys, two particularly contentious gangs of young men, clashed in the Dead

Rabbits Riots during the Fourth of July holiday in 1857.¹³ In 1858, the Quarantine (Sepoy) Riots broke out when angry residents of Tompkinsville, Castleton and Southfield on Staten Island, ostensibly fearful for their health, set fire to a nearby hospital full of patients afflicted with yellow fever.¹⁴ Because most of the patients were recent immigrants, the Quarantine Riots foreshadowed one of the root causes of many post-Civil War disputes: the middle and upper classes’ fear of and anger toward newcomers.

Several upstate militia units were also called upon to maintain law and order during the antebellum period. During the anti-rent riots of the 1830s and 1840s on the Hardenburgh Patent (Delaware County) and Rensselaerwyck (Albany County), the militia was ordered to suppress tenant farmers who were rebelling against the



The Sepoy Riots, often referred to as the Quarantine War, paralyzed much of Staten Island when a hospital treating patients afflicted with yellow fever was destroyed by angry mobs. During the initial mayhem and the weeks-long aftermath, virtually every militia unit in the First Division was called upon to assist authorities in restoring and maintaining order. This drawing, one of many illustrations accompanying an article in the 25 September 1858 issue of Leslie's, depicts the changing of the guards at the encampment of the Eighth Regiment. Subsequent issues of the newspaper, particularly the 6 November 1858 issue, provide full coverage of the entire range of services provided by the various New York City regiments during the crisis. Courtesy of James Spring, DMNA.



During the antebellum era, the militia was expected to perform a broad range of ceremonial duties at a variety of local, state and national events. In 1825 the Second Battalion (later the famous Seventh Regiment) participated in the closing ceremonies at the end of the Marquis de Lafayette's year-long visit to America. This image, part of the National Guard Heritage Series, is one of more than sixty oil paintings commissioned from various artists by the National Guard Bureau (NGB; Washington, D.C.) since 1962. The original paintings are owned by NGB; copies are available to the public.

feudal-like system of land control that persisted in New York well after the Revolutionary War. In western New York, the militia was called up to suppress insurrections against the Holland Land Company's offices in Mayville (Chautauqua County) and Batavia (Genesee County). In Auburn (Cayuga County), members of the Willard Guards were expected to provide assistance in the event of an uprising at the state prison and to protect local citizens from would-be escapees. In Oswego (Oswego County), the militia turned out to quell a riot that took place on West Seneca Street "between a party of Canadian excursionists and citizens of Oswego."¹⁵ In Buffalo (Erie County), the Sixty-fifth Regiment was called upon to subdue rioting laborers on the Erie Canal. In Rensselaer County, the Troy Citizens' Corps dispersed a mob that had sacked and burned a house of ill-repute.¹⁶

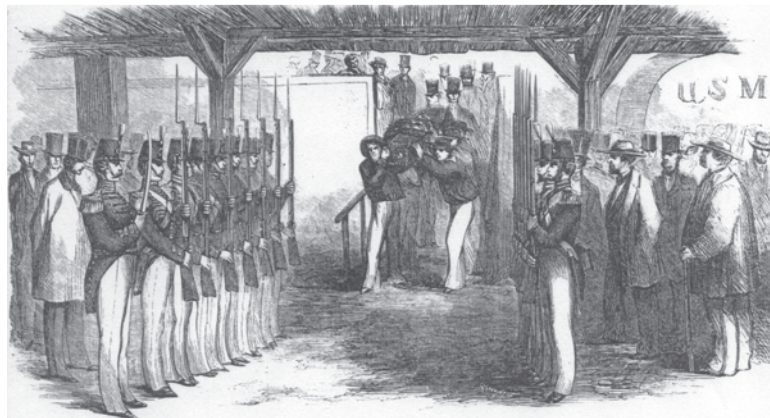
As a civic entity, like a police force or fire company, the militia was expected to participate in all sorts of public events, from the grandest, most exalted national celebrations to the smallest, most pedestrian local gatherings. For example, Manhattan's Washington Greys, who later became the Eighth Regiment, and the Second Battalion, Eleventh New York Infantry, who later became the Seventh Regiment, paraded in New York City in 1824 in honor of the arrival of the Marquis de Lafayette. The following year, the Second Battalion, by then known as the National Guards, paraded again at the end of Lafayette's year-long visit to the United States.

Throughout the antebellum era, many of New York's individual units participated in numerous high-profile, national events of either somber or festive nature. For example, the Eighth Regiment paraded in 1850 at the funeral of President Zachary Taylor. In 1858, when the remains of former President James Monroe were disinterred and returned to Virginia, the Eighth Regiment served as Guard of Honor at New York City Hall and the Seventh Regiment served as special escort on the long trip to Richmond, Virginia.

Two years later, the Seventh Regiment participated in the celebratory unveiling of Clark Mills's statue of George Washington in



Featured on the front page of the 24 July 1858 issue of *Leslie's*, this rendering portrays the officers of the Eighth Regiment who participated in the funeral obsequies of President James Monroe. The Eighth Regiment served as Guard of Honor as the remains of President Monroe lay in state at New York City Hall. Courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.



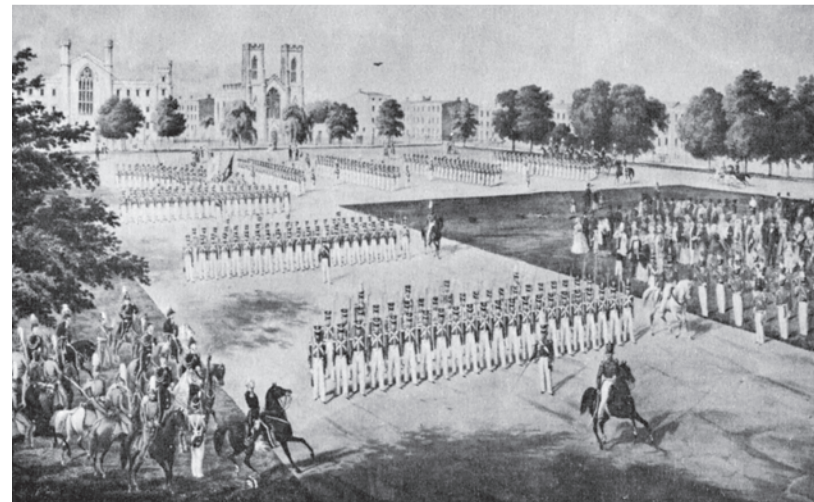
The 24 July 1858 issue of *Leslie's* contained an extensively illustrated article about the ongoing role of the militia in the interment of President Monroe. In this drawing, members of the Seventh Regiment serve as Guard of Honor as the president's coffin is delivered to Richmond, Virginia. Courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.

Washington, D.C., in 1860 as recounted in a contemporary issue of *Harper's Weekly*:

The principal feature of the whole procession was the presence of the Seventh Regiment. On the route of the march they proceeded in columns by companies. . . . [There were] eight full companies, each extending nearly from curb to curb. . . . The carriage of the men was erect, their band discoursed most excellent music, and they moved with the precision of a grand piece of machinery.¹⁷

Later that year, many of New York City's units turned out in honor of the visiting Prince of Wales:

Then passed before [the Prince] in marching order our splendid corps of volunteer soldiers, and most nobly did they sustain the honor and reputation of the city. Firm and elastic in step, manly and well disciplined in bearing, they seemed the very beau-ideal of the citizen soldier.¹⁸



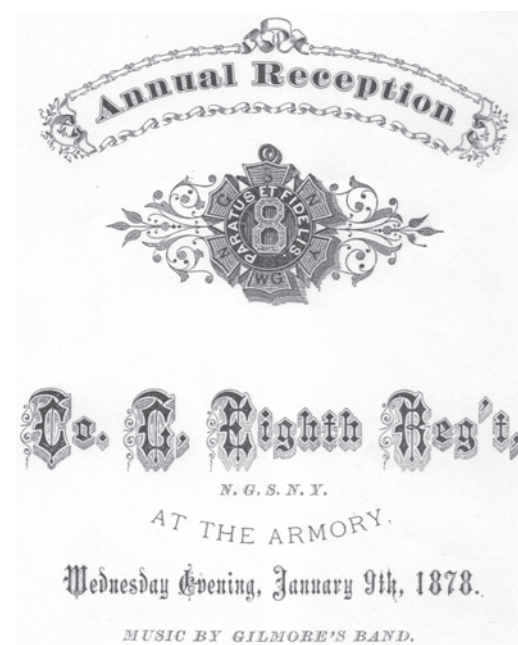
In addition to being called upon by local, state or national authorities to participate in specific events, the militia often performed for the public in a variety of monthly or annual parades, drills and mock battles. This image, published by the National Guard Association on page 16 of *The Nation's National Guard* (1954), recalls a mid-1852 review of the Seventh Regiment in New York City. Courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.



During the antebellum era, militiamen engaged in a variety of social and recreational activities that illustrated the fraternal camaraderie within and between their respective units. For example, many units commissioned musical pieces for either their own personal enjoyment or for public appearances, as seen in this 1842 song sheet for "Bayeaux's Quick Step." Commissioned by the Albany Burgesses Corps, the tribute was arranged for the piano forte, performed by the Burgesses Band, and dedicated to the officers and members of the corps. Courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.

On a local level, most communities expected their respective units to turn out for a variety of public events, such as Independence Day parades, county fairs and local political ceremonies. No civic activity was considered complete without the participation of the local militia in full dress.

As for the more private social and recreational aspects of the militia, local units often functioned as elite fraternal organizations. Some units, such as Rochester's Irish Volunteers, Rochester's German Grenadiers, two German units from the Williamsburgh neighborhood of Brooklyn and Manhattan's Sixty-ninth Regiment (composed of first- and second-generation Irishmen), were established by like-minded members of various ethnic groups. Leisure activities ranged from musical soirees to extravagant military balls staged for the community's elite; from smoking cigars and playing cards by the fire to boisterous excursions to destinations both near and far. Writing in his



Although dating from 1878, this ticket to the Company G, Eighth Regiment's annual reception is a perfect example of the types of social and fraternal activities enjoyed by the militia during the antebellum era. Courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.

memoirs in 1866, a member of Ithaca’s DeWitt Guards provided a vivid account of the lively camaraderie and good-natured rivalry between his unit and the Willard Guards of nearby Auburn. Apparently any excuse was used by the Ithaca militiamen to justify an excursion down Cayuga Lake to meet their fellow guardsmen in Auburn. The memoirs recall one summer weekend in 1859, when “the Smiles of Heaven seemed to be upon us, and everything seemed given to conduce our happiness [as we] floated down the beautiful Cayuga.”¹⁹ Upon their arrival in Auburn on a Saturday in mid-July, the DeWitt Guards were received by three companies out of Auburn and the Tompkins Blues of Trumansburg. They were treated to dinner, lively entertainment and a trip to the Auburn Cemetery to visit the grave of a former member of the DeWitt Guards. Festivities on Sunday included a visit to the state prison and state insane asylum, along with parades and drills in the afternoon with the battalion, during which “each company displayed a thorough discipline in military tactics, the movements being of almost mathematical precision.”²⁰

Mid-nineteenth-century Changes in the New York Militia

Since 1786, the state’s militia comprised two divisions: the First Division included all of Manhattan and the Second Division encompassed the remainder of the state. In an effort to organize more efficiently the large number of local and regional units that had emerged during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, particularly in Manhattan, legislation entitled “An Act for the Organization of the First Division of the New York State Militia” was passed in 1847. This led to the official establishment or redesignation of many regiments in Manhattan, including the Seventh, Eighth and Twelfth. The Second Division followed suit and restructured or redesignated many of its units in 1847 and 1848. In Brooklyn, for example, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth regiments were formalized; in Upstate New York, the Sixty-fifth Regiment in Buffalo was one of several new regiments.

(Most of these regiments retained their 1847–1848 designations until 1917, when sweeping changes in the structure of the National Guard and the U.S. Army necessitated numerous redesignations.) In 1854 the First and Second divisions were reorganized into eight divisions, an official structure that lasted until 1882.

DIVISIONS	COUNTIES INCLUDED IN DIVISIONS BETWEEN 1854 AND 1882
First	New York and Richmond
Second	Kings, Orange, Putnam, Queens, Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester
Third	Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Sullivan, Ulster and Washington
Fourth	Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence and Warren
Fifth	Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Fulton, Hamilton, Herkimer, Madison, Montgomery, Otsego, Schenectady and Schoharie
Sixth	Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Schuyler, Seneca, Tioga and Tompkins
Seventh	Chemung, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Steuben, Wayne and Yates
Eighth	Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming

Within each division, there were usually three brigades; within each brigade, usually three regiments; within each regiment, two to four companies. By the late 1850s, the various regiments included approximately 220 companies of infantrymen, 41 of cavalrymen and 37 of riflemen, for a total of approximately 18,000 troops.²¹ This figure represents only those who officially belonged to active units. New York’s enrolled militia, that is, those able-bodied men subject to conscription if needed, numbered, as of 1859, approximately 350,000.

The Civil War and the Draft Riots of July 1863

When the Civil War broke out in 1861 and President Abraham Lincoln called for troops, New York State was ready, willing and able to supply its quota. In fact, during the course of the war, New York supplied nearly 20 percent of the entire northern forces; many soldiers on the front were well-trained, highly experienced militiamen. Furthermore, the commanding officers of many of the North's wartime regiments were recruited directly from New York's existing militia units. New York's militia was so strong and well organized that not only did the state send regiments to the front but it was also able to maintain many fully staffed home guard units.

During the war, some of New York's existing units, such as Manhattan's Sixty-ninth and Seventh regiments, served intact under their antebellum designations; other units served intact under new designations. For example, Brooklyn's Fourteenth Regiment was redesignated the Eighty-fourth New York Volunteer Infantry, even though it was commonly known as the Fourteenth Brooklyn. Other preexisting regiments, as well as most of the smaller separate companies, were split up again and again to complete various newly created, wartime regiments. Still others, such as the Twenty-second, Twenty-third and Forty-seventh regiments, were organized at the outbreak of the conflict and continued to thrive long after the end of the war.

Despite conflicting opinions about the performance of citizen soldiers at the front, there is one specific, Civil War-related episode that attracted widespread praise for the militia: the New York City Draft Riots of July 1863. The Thirteenth, Twenty-third, Forty-seventh and Seventy-first regiments were all called into state service. Some units even returned from the front to battle angry mobs rioting against the implementation of conscription.²² The militia is credited with assisting, and even leading, local authorities in regaining control of the situation and restoring law and order. Its success in dispersing

Mustered into federal service in August 1861, the Seventh Regiment was one of the best-trained, well-equipped militia units to fight in the Civil War. This image of a representative member of the Seventh, painted by Don Troiani in 1993, depicts the epitome of a physically fit, finely attired citizen soldier during the Civil War era. Painting by Don Troiani, www.historicalartprints.com.





The militia was called in to suppress the 1863 Draft Riots when local police forces proved insufficient to contain the mayhem. In an extensively illustrated article in the 1 August 1863 issue of Harper's Weekly, police are depicted charging rioters who were sacking the printing house of the Tribune.

the draft rioters, in addition to the respect it had gained during the antebellum period, was a major factor in establishing the National Guard's primary role as the keeper of domestic peace during the late nineteenth-century era of labor-capital conflict.

Post-Civil War Era: Labor-Capital Conflict

The antebellum disturbances and the Civil War Draft Riots paled in comparison with the labor-capital conflicts that plagued much of the nation during the Gilded Age, which spanned the last third of the nineteenth century. Urbanization, industrialization and immigration increased astronomically after the Civil War, especially after America rebounded from the devastating economic Panic of 1873. Clever, ambitious and sometimes unscrupulous entrepreneurs and leaders of burgeoning new industries ascended to previously unimaginable heights of wealth and power; concurrently, many others descended into the depths of poverty and despair. America, previously a classless society, at least compared to her counterparts in Europe, was suddenly stratified, with an ever-widening gap between rich and poor. The destitute, many of whom were immigrants, were crowded into unheated and unventilated tenements without adequate utilities or running water. Those who were lucky enough to find employment often toiled endlessly in dangerous and unsanitary factories; eight-hour days, medical insurance and disability compensation were unheard of. Not surprisingly, unrest among the unemployed and working poor began to ferment. America's first labor unions were established during this period: the National Labor Union (NLU), the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) were created in 1866, 1869 and 1886, respectively.²³

The tension between "labor" (the workers and their sympathizers) and "capital" (the owners/managers and their allies) was exacerbated by the arrival of a relatively small but volatile and vociferous contingent of Eastern European anarchists, socialists and communists. Labeled rebels by the increasingly uneasy members of America's middle and upper classes, these political radicals joined forces with the

already restless lower-class laborers and unemployed, causing widespread panic among many Americans who began to fear that the country was on the brink of all-out class warfare. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the National Guard emerged as the defender and ultimate savior of the status quo.

The late nineteenth-century era of labor-capital conflict was ushered in with the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. The conflict began in mid-July in West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania when firemen and brakemen on the freight lines of the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad Company revolted against their employer for cutting wages. Rapidly spreading throughout the Northeast, the strike crippled and ultimately paralyzed much of the country for several weeks. Many states called out their volunteer militia units to restore order along the affected rail lines, while President Rutherford B. Hayes ordered the regular army into service in the worst-hit areas of West Virginia. In New York, the center of unrest occurred in Hornellsville (Steuben County), when firemen and brakemen on the western division of the Erie Railroad stopped all trains and tore up the tracks. The Twenty-third Regiment of Brooklyn was ordered to Hornellsville, the Eighth Regiment of Manhattan to Buffalo and the Ninth Regiment, also of Manhattan, to Albany. While Pennsylvania and West Virginia sustained great disruption and extensive property damage, the presence of the New York militia is credited with keeping the level of mayhem and destruction along the Empire State's rail corridors to a minimum.

Numerous ever-bloodier conflicts followed in the wake of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, as workers in a broad range of industries rebelled against low wages, long hours and dangerous working conditions. At the national level, these included the Haymarket (Anarchist) Affair of 1886 in Chicago, the Carnegie Steel Strike of 1892 in Homestead, Pennsylvania, and the Pullman Strike of 1894 in Chicago.²⁴ In New York, notable instances of unrest were the Buffalo Switchmen's Strike of 1892 and the Brooklyn Trolley Strike of 1895.

The Buffalo strike began in August, when switchmen employed by the Philadelphia & Reading, the Erie, the New York Central and the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh railroad companies rebelled against low wages and poor working conditions. National Guard units

from all across the state were called out to restore order along 800 miles of track. It took more than 7,000 troops nearly two weeks to end the mayhem.

The Brooklyn Trolley Strike broke out on 14 January 1895, when labor organizations controlling the motormen, conductors and other employees of the trolley system rebelled against low wages and long hours. Tracks were blocked, trolley cars were overturned or burned, trolley wires were cut and “the hoodlum element, ever present in great cities, and ready to welcome disorders in which they may gain something, if only amusement . . . made haste to join the disturbances.”²⁵ The local police force proved unable to contain the rioters, particularly because many policemen were in sympathy with the strikers. It was not until 28 January that 4,000 troops from the First Brigade (Manhattan) and 3,000 troops from the Second Brigade (Brooklyn) were able to restore order along the trolley system.

Smaller but equally disturbing riots in communities throughout the state included a strike by laborers on the Erie Canal near Rochester in 1871, an insurrection at the cement works in Rosendale (Ulster County) in 1875, a switchmen’s strike in Waverly (Tioga County) in 1892 and an uprising against a cholera quarantine camp on Fire Island (Long Island Sound, Suffolk County) in 1892.²⁶ The National Guard was called out on each of these occasions and largely succeeded in suppressing the rioters. Although the militiamen incurred the wrath of pro-labor factions and were condemned as brutal policemen of industry, for the most part they drew the praise and respect of the general public as valiant keepers of domestic peace.

Press Coverage: The National Guard and Labor Disputes

Naturally, the press covered labor-capital conflicts, especially those that affected large regions of America or the entire nation. Since most newspapers, journals and magazines were owned and operated by and written for the educated upper classes, their reports supported the interests of capital and condemned the actions of labor. For example, E. L. Godkin, one of the most famous publishers and spokesmen of the



The Twenty-third Regiment played a pivotal role in suppressing the Brooklyn Trolley Strike of 1895. Photograph (1895) courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.

conservative, antilabor wing during the late nineteenth century, wrote a scathing account of the Great Railroad Strike in an 1877 issue of the *Nation*. He advocated dealing harshly with the “riotous poor,” the “day-laborers of the lowest class” and the immigrants “who carry in their very blood traditions which give universal suffrage an air of menace to many of the things which civilized men hold most dear.”²⁷ Other popular, conservative journals, such as the religiously oriented *Independent* and the secular, widely circulated *North American Review*, expressed similar views.

Many popular weekly newspapers and magazines also published alarmist accounts of the Great Railroad Strike. For example, the 11 August 1877 issue of *Harper’s Weekly* was peppered with phrases such as “the reign of terror,” “lawless and howling mobs” and “deeds of violence written in fire and blood.”²⁸ The following week, another

article in the same magazine praised the state's militia for its role in suppressing the strike: "The New York National Guard, the flower of American citizen soldiery, have by their attitude and conduct earned the grateful respect of all good citizens everywhere in the country."²⁹

Nationally circulated publications also covered the Buffalo Switchmen's Strike of 1892 and the Brooklyn Trolley Strike of 1895. An article in the March 1895 issue of *Outing* by Daniel S. Mercein reported that in Brooklyn "the presence of the State troops seemed to arouse the baser passions of what was now a lawless mob, the strikers' ranks having been augmented by many gangs of the tougher element of Brooklyn's lower classes."³⁰ The trolley strike was broken after Governor Levi P. Morton called up the entire First Brigade, bringing the number of troops to nearly 7,000. The members of the various units of the National Guard returned home as heroes, as recounted by Mercein,

This masterly demonstration of force by civic and military authorities proves that to successfully enforce respect for and obedience to the law, and to secure every man his individual liberty and rights, a State must have a large, disciplined, well-equipped and enthusiastic National Guard. New York can well be proud of its citizen soldiery, who have on many occasions forsaken business and home comforts, sacrificed pleasure for duty, to stand shoulder to shoulder and protect the lives and property of its citizens.³¹

In more general terms, the author of a series of articles in the March, April and May 1895 issues of the *Bostonian* despaired that America's cities were

teeming with immigration of all kinds, from every nation under the sun, and staggering under the loathsome burden of such ignorance, prejudice and corruption as go far to threaten with dire failure the huge experiment of our republican regime. . . . [The rioters are] as ignorant and untutored as horses or donkeys. . . . They must be taught—by moral suasion, if possible; by force, if there should be need.³²

A few late nineteenth-century publications attempted to counter the mainstream press. For example, the *Arena*, a monthly

journal of social reform published in Boston, featured a lengthy article by B. O. Flower in October 1894 that condemned the increase of militarism in America:

[The country] is becoming a mighty armed camp, with enormous armories, not infrequently erected and furnished by individuals, for companies and regiments of troops who can be relied upon as being absolutely loyal to capital in any struggle between plutocracy or corporate greed and slaving industry. . . . Monopoly in land, class legislation, special privileges and gambling have enabled a handful of men to acquire wealth earned by millions, and with that wealth to corrupt government and crush industry into practical serfdom. . . . It is always to the military arm that an oppressive government, of whatever character, looks for a continuation of power. And for this reason every true patriot and lover of the republic should discourage the war spirit and seek to check the spread of the military tendency which plutocracy is so energetically fostering at the present time. . . . [Armories are] bastiles of death which speak in such an unmistakable manner of the real materialism of the age and the absence of soul kinship with the Prince of Peace.³³

However, Flower did not speak for the majority of Americans who perceived the National Guard as ensuring, rather than threatening, their way of life. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to its effectiveness in suppressing working-class uprisings, the militia was at its peak in terms of public support. Whether citizen soldiers acted as brutal policemen of industry or trustworthy guardians of law and order is a question best left to military and labor historians; suffice it to say that the National Guard paved the way for orderly and productive industrial activity in capitalist America. And furthermore, despite continued debate about a centralized versus a decentralized armed force, the volunteer militia remained the backbone of the American military system throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The sudden increase in armory construction during the 1880s and the 1890s in New York State was a direct reflection of this meteoric rise in prestige and popularity of the National Guard during the Gilded Age.

Early 1880s to Late 1890s: Camp Smith, the Consolidation Act of 1882 and the Armory Law of 1884

Several noteworthy developments occurred during the 1880s and 1890s that affected the evolution of the state's militia during the

latter years of the Gilded Age. In 1882 a state training camp, Camp Smith, was established near Peekskill (Westchester County) for the annual training of troops. While not directly impacting the state's armory construction program, the creation of the centralized training camp served to unite the state's geographically scattered units into a more cohesive entity. Mandatory biannual, one-week (later



Camp Smith, established in 1882 near Peekskill, New York, was an open-air training ground for the state's militia units, all of which were mandated to one week (later two weeks) of annual training. Hundreds, even thousands, of photographs were taken of various units at the camp during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; many are stored in the archives of the New York State Military Museum.

two-week) training sessions allowed militiamen to bond with their comrades, thereby fostering loyalty and commitment to the system. The centralized gatherings also allowed the state's high-ranking officers regularly to review, evaluate and more systematically control the individual units.

The Consolidation Act of 1882 reduced the state's eight National Guard divisions, which had been created in 1854, to four divisions. By 1886 these four divisions were renamed *brigades*.³⁴ More important, at least in terms of impact upon armory building programs of the period, was the passage of the Armory Law of 1884, a critical component of which provided for the creation of the New York City Armory Board. This quasi-public board, composed of local and state politicians, military representatives and private consultants, immediately had a profound impact on the construction of new armories in Manhattan and, after 1898, in all boroughs of New York City.

Several changes at the federal level paralleled these legislative initiatives in New York. During the mid-1880s, several amendments were made to the Militia Law of 1792, which, for nearly a century, had been the supreme military law of the land. The most important amendment doubled the federal government's annual appropriation of \$200,000, a sum that had remained unchanged since 1806. The \$400,000 appropriation was to subsidize all financial needs of the various state militias. However, it was a ridiculously low figure considering, for example, that the average cost of constructing a single regimental armory in New York City during the 1880s and 1890s was at least \$500,000. As in the past, the federal government imposed mandates on the state militias and foisted the burden of implementation on the states and localities. While many states would not, or could not, fulfill these mandates, New York willingly and eagerly assumed its responsibilities: between ca. 1880 and ca. 1900, millions of state tax dollars were spent building nearly fifty armories across the state.

1900 to World War II

During the first half of the twentieth century, the National Guard underwent a radical transformation. Once the backbone of the American military system, the guard began to assume an auxiliary role as a reserve force of the U.S. Army. In terms of federal legislation, the change was marked by the passage of the Dick Act in 1903 and the National Defense Acts of 1916 and 1920, all three of which sanctioned the regular, centralized armed forces as the official mainstay of the American military system.³⁵ These legislative acts were the culmination of trends dating back to the late 1890s that foreshadowed the downsizing of the militia. The two most important events at the national level were the election of President William McKinley in 1896 and America's surprisingly decisive victory in the Spanish American War of 1898.³⁶ The prowess of the U.S. armed forces, particularly the U.S. Navy, displayed against Spain in the interest of liberating Cuba and the Philippines, catapulted America into a position of international leadership. Federalists, who for centuries had argued for the preeminence of a centralized army, renewed their efforts to persuade government and military officials as well as the general public that a decentralized militia was incapable of meeting the country's military needs.

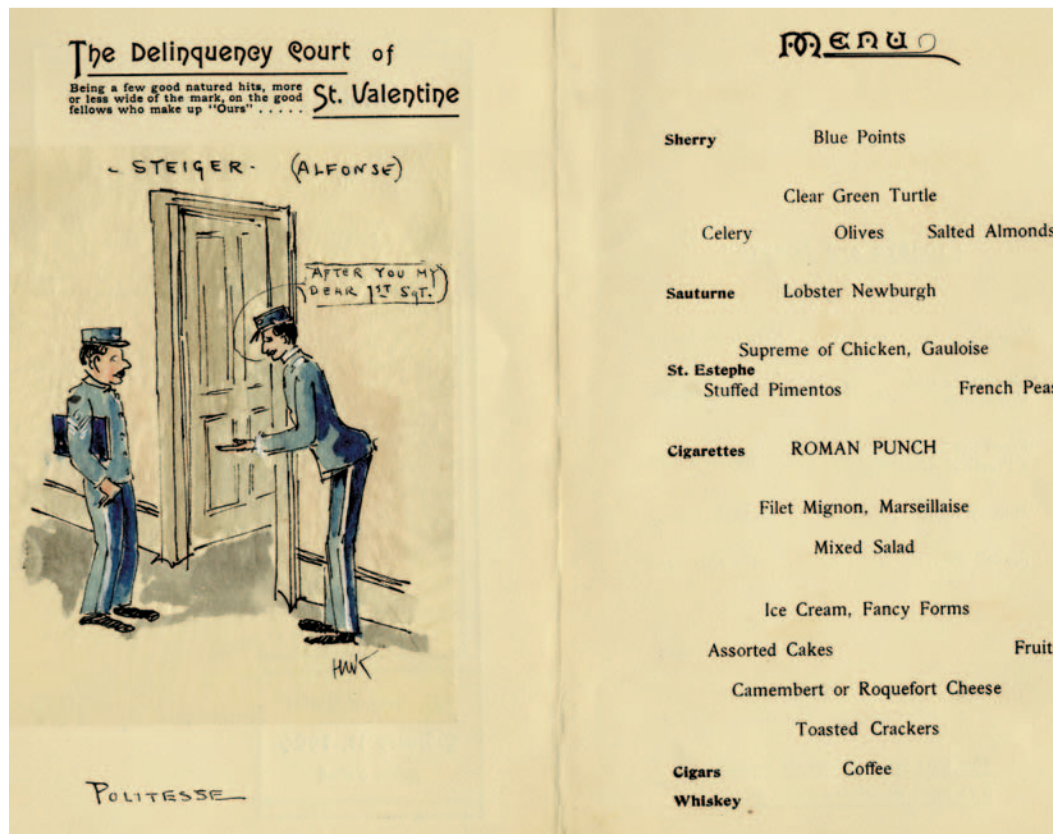
These arguments were reinforced by social and economic changes that were undermining the role of the militia. By 1900 the fear of class warfare that had nearly paralyzed the country between the mid-1870s and the mid-1890s began to subside, primarily because the middle and upper classes had essentially succeeded in silencing the lower classes: first, via military might, and second, via employers' and society's concessions to some of the workers' more serious complaints. In particular, an eight-hour workday replaced the twelve-hour shifts that previously dominated industry; a minimum-wage law was enacted; and new tenement laws required improvements in heat, water, light and ventilation systems in housing for the poor and working classes. Furthermore, although sporadic strikes and riots continued into the twentieth

century, the public's perception of the conflict changed dramatically. Strikes were viewed simply as annoying disturbances to productivity rather than harbingers of the breakdown of the capitalist economy or the republican form of government. Equally important, fledgling state police forces began to replace the militia as the preferred tool for labor suppression. Finally, taxpayers, many still paying off debts incurred by the late nineteenth century armory construction projects, were simply tired of subsidizing their increasingly expensive militia units.

Thus the way was paved for the passage of the three pivotal congressional acts that redefined, but did not abolish, the National Guard during the early twentieth century. Local units of state-controlled citizen soldiers remained stable and even served in active duty during the Mexican border dispute (1916), World War I (1918–1919) and World War II (1941–1945). In terms of noncombat duty, National Guard units began to evolve into proactive community organizations in their hometowns and cities, and their armories began



In the midst of its changing role in terms of military structure and responsibility, the National Guard remained a popular civic, social and fraternal organization. In the public realm, the militia continued to impress and entertain crowds in all sorts of parades, reviews and drills, as seen in this historic photograph of the Seventh Regiment marching in full dress in New York City. Photograph (undated, but believed to have been taken during the second decade of the twentieth century) courtesy of the New York State Military Museum.



On the more private side, members of the various units continued to amuse themselves with social outings, attendance at cultural events or private dinners. The menu depicted is from a dinner held by the Eighth Regiment in 1904. The menus, each of which was illustrated with a hand-painted cartoon designed for a specific member of the unit (in this case, Sergeant Alfonse Steiger), also served as place cards. About two dozen of these place cards are in the Eighth Regiment archives at the New York State Military Museum.

to function as civic centers, particularly after World War I. The congressional acts had preserved the integrity of locally based militia units, thereby ensuring the survival of National Guard traditions that fostered camaraderie among young men, loyalty to country and local civic responsibility. Many National Guard units quickly became pivotal public entities whose interests in community stability and well-being were equal to those of local politicians, businessmen and private citizens.

Post-World War II History of the National Guard

After World War II, the federal reserve forces replaced the state-controlled militias as the country's primary reserve force. The National Guard became the U.S. Army's secondary reserve force. During the cold war era, the National Guard's primary mission was military readiness, although in reality, citizen soldiers were seldom called out for combat duty. Instead, the National Guard flourished as a provider of domestic security during times of natural disasters or localized incidents of civil unrest. At the national level, the National Guard is remembered for subduing war protesters at Ohio's Kent State University in 1970 and assisting local police during the Los Angeles Race Riots of 1992. In New York, the National Guard was called out to restore order during a riot at Attica State Prison in 1971. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signaled the end of the Cold War; subsequently, virtually all levels of the military were downsized accordingly. The National Guard was among the hardest hit: it suffered severe cutbacks in both funding and enrollment.

During the 1990s, the New York Army National Guard began to experience a period of rejuvenation. New York's citizen soldiers responded when the Blizzard of 1996 hit New York City and the Ice Storm of 1998 paralyzed New York's North Country. Beginning in 1996, special units of the New York National Guard were sent to augment NATO peacekeeping forces in Bosnia. In terms of community service, the National Guard won acclaim for airlifting abandoned cars out of the ecologically sensitive Pine Barrens in Southampton

(Suffolk County) and the similarly fragile Pine Bush Preserve in Colonie (Albany County). In order to retain existing enrollment and attract new enlistees, Governor Pataki signed a tuition reimbursement bill in 1997 that provided funds to cover new enlistees' college expenses. The following year, guardHELP, a program charged with spearheading community service projects, was launched.

In the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in Manhattan and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, the National Guard has once again ascended to a paramount



Throughout the cold war era, the National Guard remained an important, state-based reserve force within the American military system. Although Guardsmen participated in nearly every post-World War II military engagement, their most widely recognized function was as disaster-relief workers and as aids to local, state or federal forces during times of civil unrest. In New York, for example, National Guardsmen were mobilized in September 2005 to assist a variety of local, state and federal authorities responding to Hurricane Katrina, which devastated parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

position in the American military system. Numerous units were immediately activated by their respective states to perform security and relief duties in the metropolitan areas of New York City and Washington, D.C. Subsequently, National Guardsmen and women from all across the country have been systematically called to full-time, active duty in the Global War on Terror. To date, members of the New York Army National Guard are among the most distinguished, most highly decorated citizen soldiers in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.



After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on America, the National Guard reasserted its pivotal role in the American military system. According to a late 2005 quote from Lieutenant General Steven H. Blum, Chief of the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C., "We have moved from simply being the nation's strategic reserve to serving as a full operational force, where Homeland Defense is Job One and overseas deployments are Homeland Defense in depth." Pictured here is a New York National Guardsman stationed on the front in Iraq (2005; courtesy of DMNA).



This template for an 1842 Certificate of Honorary Membership in the Brooklyn City Guard conveys the feeling of pride and patriotism enjoyed by members of the volunteer militia during the antebellum era. The City Guard was one of several units in New York's Second Division that formed the nucleus of the Thirteenth Regiment, officially organized in 1847. The building in the center of the certificate is Gothic Hall, an older building converted for use as an armory during the 1830s by Brooklyn's citizen soldiery.